



**TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION  
RECREATION EDUCATIONAL SERVICES DIVISION  
PARKS AND RECREATION BENCHMARKING PROGRAM**

**BENCHMARKING STANDARDS  
COMPLIANCE/RESOURCE GUIDE**

**Level: Tier III Status**

A city, town or county can be classified as Tier III provided all of the objectives are established and achieved in Tier I, & Tier II and the first twelve of the following sixteen objectives. Please attach a one-page overview/narrative for each standard, along with attachments.

Listed below each standard, you will find an Explanation of that standard along with Suggested Evidence of Compliance, which outlines specific documentation/examples that must be attached with this report.

**1. Legal Authority, Role and Responsibility.**

- a. Board accepts certain responsibilities to include:
  - i. Actively supports the Director and his or her policies, both within the organization and to outside parties, as long as performance is judged satisfactory.
  - ii. Assists City or County officials, or takes lead in, replacing the Director promptly.
  - iii. Participates actively in the decisions to elect and re-elect board members.
  - iv. Assists or determines compensation of senior professional management.
  - v. Discusses and advises proposed major changes in the organizations strategy and direction, major financing proposals, and other crucial issues, usually proposed by the Director.
  - vi. Requires Director to explain rationale behind operating budgets, major capital expenditures, acquisitions, investments, personnel matters and planning.
  - vii. Formulates major policies regarding professional ethics including public responsibilities, conveying to the organization no tolerance by the board on violations to these policies.

- viii. Analyzes performance reports of the organization, addresses questions to highlight areas of concern, and suggests possible actions to improve performance.

**Explanation:** The department must understand and apply organizational and political practices to foster meaningful relationships with boards, commissioners, staff; governmental, non-profit and private organizations; and the public to enhance leisure service opportunities. The Director should prepare a review of policies for the board and also provide recommendations on the status and evaluation of such policies. Guidelines for internal relationships are often incorporated into job position descriptions.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Copy of agency/department policy manual with cover letter indicating its distribution and the review by the board and administrators; written guidelines for organizational changes/strategies; budget narratives; performance reviews.

**2. A Formal Organizational Structure established that includes increased size and complexity of services, facilities and programming.**

- a. Hierarchical structure uses departmentalization and generates an organization chart that shows chain of command with a top-down structure. Steps include:
  - i. Departmentalized by functions.
  - ii. Assigns tasks to specific positions and units to take advantage of the specialized skills of certain employees.
  - iii. Divide and distribute the overall work load of the organization (division of labor or delineation of responsibility).
  - iv. Establish the number of people who will report to each supervisor (span of control).
  - v. Ensures that there is unity of command.
  - vi. Determine the degree of power and control of each position (delegation of authority).
- b. A nonhierarchical structure is an alternate form that is used in some systems. They are classified by:
  - i. Work teams – The key is coordinating efforts to meet a common objective. There is no power structure. Each member of the team is on the same level as every other member. Each member comes to the team with different level of expertise needed for the project.
  - ii. Outsourcing – outside businesses or agencies contracted for services.
- c. Administrative offices are generally accessible to the public, provide a wide array of information, have an attractive and adequate reception area, which reflects the professional atmosphere of the organization.
  - i. Adequate and attractive work environments for employees, volunteers and visitors.
  - ii. Comfortable and attractive meeting rooms for planning, education and other needs.

- iii. Sufficient storage or warehousing facilities, a library for research and adequate administrative space and equipment.
- d. Adequate support staff and services provided to professional staff to perform their appropriate functions.
- e. A communication system is to insure accurate and timely transfer of information, especially to higher levels of government, counterpart agencies, news media and the public.

**Explanation:** A department must have a structure in place as described in a-e above.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide copy of department's structure, whether hierarchical in nature or other system based on work teams, i.e. – and show examples of staffing, programs, action plans, resources utilized, interagency partnerships, etc. Maps/brochures showing administrative space and describing types of space available for use internally, and by the public. Listing of adequate support staff and services and a communication plan.

### **3. Partnerships established:**

- a. Include written agreements with others as stated in Tier II, but also written agreements with school districts, parks and recreation departments, and recreation providers in adjoining jurisdictions or jurisdictions having concurrent authority in the service area of the department.
  - i. This standard ensures that park and recreation personnel are aware of the diverse resources at their disposal.
  - ii. Recreation departments or providers should include, where applicable, such agencies as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE); Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA); National Park Service (NPS); other local or county parks and recreation departments; Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA); Big Brothers/Big Sisters and a variety of other providers.
  - iii. (This section in Tier III will assist in the overall goal of establishing Recreation Corridors and lead to a Seamless Recreation System for Tennessee).
  - iv. There is a liaison from the department to other local government agencies and legislative authorities such as city or county commissions, school boards, zoning commissions, public works, state and federal legislators, etc.

**Explanation:** Long-term agreements with periodic review are preferable to annual agreements, since they permit longer-range program planning. Written agreements should exist between the parks and recreation department and other city/county agencies, as well as the schools and other public and private agencies. It is important to have representation from the park and recreation department on all appropriate inter-governmental committees, especially with the regulatory agencies.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide examples of written agreements and situations that use a liaison system. Provide letters of agreement, directories or lists of available services/resources from other departments or recreation-related agencies.

**4. Several types of planning concepts comprise planning in Tier III: Comprehensive or Master Planning; Community Planning; and Internal Systems Planning.**

- a. Required Comprehensive or Master Planning must include:
  - i. Integration of programs/services and physical resources.
  - ii. Community study and demographics.
  - iii. Inventory of community programs/services and physical resources.
  - iv. Continuous environmental scans (information gathering to determine the current conditions, internal and external, of the organization. Most likely completed through citizen surveys, public meetings, and evaluation of specific environmental factors).
  - v. Resources needed to implement.
  - vi. Priorities, action plans, and timelines.
  - vii. Interagency partnerships.
  - viii. The appropriate governing body should officially adopt this plan, update regularly and link with capital improvement budgets and phased development.
- b. Complete Community Planning including:
  - i. The department must regularly include community planning and participate in the formulation of community wide plans to coordinate with others such as: transportation, public safety, public works, planning and zoning, school systems, etc.
  - ii. Professional park and recreation personnel are part of the team for total community planning.
  - iii. The creation of a Community Planning Study, at least every five years, based on population shifts and changing social and economic conditions.
  - iv. The department should have a strong working relationship with professional recreation state organizations, state legislative communities, and state recreation associations to assist in disseminating information for local and state planning.
- c. Complete Internal Systems Planning, which is essential for effective operational management and will include:
  - i. Information technology, public relations and marketing, human resources, financial management and budgeting (which often includes a five year capital plan), risk management, law enforcement and security, maintenance and evaluation.
- d. The department must have planning and research functions with established responsibilities and should employ at least one staff member or consultant who has planning and research capability.

**Explanation:** This standard covers the importance of planning on many levels: community, strategic, and comprehensive planning. It also recognizes that research plays an integral role in planning and assessing societal and local trends. Cover all sections as listed above in a-d.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Identify instances and personnel who served as part of a community planning team or who worked with state/federal agencies on community planning issues. Provide a copy of the agency's strategic plan and date of approval by board, and indicate progress made in implementing the plan. Attach copy of current comprehensive planning efforts, including internal systems planning. Provide copy of responsibilities of the planning and research function of your department and job description of person with this function and/or consultant agreement.

**5. Recreation Programs, Services and Events provided shall be based on:**

- a. Programs and services should provide recreation opportunities under direct face-to-face leadership, including skills instructions.
- b. The department's programs provide opportunities in all program fields for various levels of proficiency, socio-economic levels, racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages, and gender in accordance with the department's statement of mission.
  - i. Offer opportunities for levels of proficiency by offering skills instruction, clubs, leagues, tournaments, etc., for different levels of ability.
  - ii. This standard of skill proficiency is for the cultural arts as well as the physical skills.
  - iii. An agency, in offering opportunities from each of the program fields, should give special consideration to those, which emphasize appreciation and understanding, and skill development.
  - iv. Adequate opportunities must be available to persons of all races, creeds, and colors, as well as ages and gender, and regardless of physical or mental disability or economic level.
- c. The selection of program content, specific activities, and opportunities are based upon an understanding of individual differences and the culture of the community.
- d. The program shall provide structurally for a wide range of types of participation.
- e. There is a plan of education for leisure and recreation experiences.

**Explanation:** The department should determine what programs and services are provided through a professional, systematic, and studied approach. Program planning principles/determinants are: conceptual foundations of play, recreation, and leisure; constituent needs; community opportunities; agency philosophy and goals; and experiences desirable for the given location/community.

The public entity is not independent, but should consider the following when selecting programs and services: other opportunities offered in the community, the particular needs of the targeted constituencies, and the department's goals and objectives. Participants, volunteers, and staff should have input into program selection and evaluation.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide written statement and examples that the main program planning philosophies were used in planning for programs and services. Describe the process for obtaining and utilizing different types of input. Provide a list of ways in which services/programs are delivered. Provide copy of your Program Plan that includes objectives, leadership opportunities, fee-based programs, outreach services, scope of program content and program evaluation.

## **6. Facility Use Management**

- a. A security plan must be developed for each building and facility. Annual reviews and inspections should reflect changes. Security plan should include alarm systems, key and lock systems and professional security personnel to patrol sites.
- b. There must be a fleet management plan, including inventory and maintenance schedule, for all vehicles and other equipment.
- c. There must be policies and procedures for the management of and accountability for department-owned property, including purchase and distribution to authorized persons, proper training of appropriate personnel in use of equipment, safe, secure storage of equipment, and maintenance of all equipment in operational readiness and working order.
- d. A written environmentally sound standards and procedures for development and maintenance of the Department's natural resources, with particular attention to protection and preservation of especially-sensitive land and water issues.
- e. There must be competent personnel/crews with clearly defined duties, job descriptions identifying specialty areas for routine to major maintenance (including electrical and plumbing), general development and construction, a high dedication to attractiveness of areas, facilities and equipment, and overall cleanliness of facilities.
- f. An established replacement schedule for all park and recreation properties and facilities and equipment.

**Explanation:** The department must demonstrate their understanding of and ability to implement principles and procedures related to operation and care of resources, areas, and facilities. Effective maintenance of grounds and facilities requires the selection, training, and supervision of workers in a wide variety of tasks. Supervisory staff must focus on maintenance management, such as workload control and supervision of the technical details of maintenance work.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide plans, policies and written examples as listed in a – f above.

## **7. Marketing, Public Relations and Customer Service**

- a. The department has a marketing component with specific functions and a written plan, which includes annual evaluations of the entire marketing/public relation's components.
- b. There is a marketing research component in the marketing plan.
- c. A designation of a person within the department, with an appropriate job description, to direct the marketing component of the department.
- d. The parks and recreation department must monitor and evaluate the quality of its facilities, natural resources (areas), programs and services from a users perspective.
- e. The personnel responsible for the marketing, public relations and information must submit a report to the department's director, identifying how the marketing functions are evaluated and the collected data is used to enhance the department's goals. This report is done quarterly, and no less than annually.

**Explanation:** Effective market research, planning, product development, strategies and objectives for delivering demand-driven, high quality programs and services contribute to successful park and recreation operations. Marketing is a process for accomplishing the department's mission and goals/objectives. Marketing is recognized as a crucial function.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide a Marketing Plan including the research component; position description of coordinator and their functions; copies of user surveys; quarterly/annual reports on how the marketing function within the department is evaluated and focuses on specific accomplishments.

## **8. Recruitment and Selection of Personnel**

- a. There is a comprehensive and aggressive recruitment program to secure qualified personnel. There is a manual that describes all components of the selection process.
- b. Personnel hiring should include procedures for background investigations prior to appointment.
- c. There is a disciplinary system related to the code of conduct and performance evaluation.
- d. The establishment of a grievance procedure process.

**Explanation:** The department must understand and demonstrate a professional organization – utilizing ethical principles and professionalism as applied to all professional practices, attitudes, and behaviors in leisure services delivery.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** A comprehensive employee manual of the park and recreation department will encompass many of these standards in this section and provide the requested evidence of compliance.

## **9. Fiscal Policy**

- a. There are written procedures for emergency purchasing or rental agreements for equipment.
- b. The department will have an accounting system, including an independent audit as required by City/County direction.
- c. There are written procedures for maintaining control over personnel in relation to budget authorizations.
- d. There are procedures used for collecting, safeguarding, and disbursing cash to include: maintenance of an allotment system, records of appropriations among organizational components; prescription of financial statements; conduct of internal audits; and persons or positions authorized to accept or disburse funds.
- e. Written procedures for internal monitoring of the department's non-cash fiscal activities.

**Explanation:** Financial management is the process of planning for, acquiring, and using funds to achieve predetermined organization goals and objectives. Three major functions of financial management are common to park and recreation organizations: 1) determine the scope and content of fiscal policies; 2) obtain the best possible mix of financing alternatives; and 3) establish fiscal guidelines and controls to ensure that funds are allocated and spent wisely and responsibly to achieve the highest quality products and services possible.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide plans, policies and written examples as listed in a – e above.

## **10. Resource Management and Land Use Planning**

- a. Where deemed advisable or required by law, there must be feasibility studies completed prior to construction to determine the appropriateness of certain facilities (golf courses, swimming pools, zoological parks, etc.).
- b. There are written policies and procedures for land acquisition by the department for parks, recreation, conservation, and historical-cultural purposes.
- c. A park planner, landscape architect, or other design professional prepares and conducts all plans and studies depending upon the nature of the project.
- d. Written procedures are in place providing safeguards for public interest when it becomes necessary to dispose of parks and recreation lands.

**Explanation:** There are written environmentally sound standards and procedures for development and maintenance of the department's natural resources, with particular attention to protection and preservation of especially sensitive land and water areas.



**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Provide copy of Land Use Plan; policies and procedures; open space studies or plans; land disposal policy.

## **11. Human Resources**

- a. An operating on-the-job training program, which is evaluated, updated, and revised annually.
- b. A program of career development (and self-improvement) based on needs of individual employees, including the responsibilities of employee and employer.
- c. There must be an on-going recruitment, selection, and orientation program for volunteers.
- d. Volunteers covered for negligence liability by the agency.
- e. Consultants and contract employees are utilized for special functions on a continual basis.

**Explanation:** Competent professional leadership employed to carry out the program in accord with goals and objectives. Qualified staff for the positions as provided in the job analyses. There is an orientation program for all personnel employed by the department.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Job training and/or career development plans for staff and volunteers; provide contracts that are utilized for provision of special functions; volunteer manual.

## **12. Management of Information Systems/Records Management**

- a. The department has a management information system, including statistical and data summaries of department's activities, such as daily, monthly and annual reports.
- b. Appropriate service statistics maintained to plan, interpret, and evaluate the recreation and park program.

**Explanation:** Increased productivity through use of information technology (IT) in management decisions is the ultimate goal of information technology management. IT solves business problems and increases personal productivity. Appropriate records on individual participants and groups should be maintained in a form that lends itself to summarization of useful information, such as proportion of constituents receiving services, number of participants registered, number of groups and sessions, and the attendance, etc.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance:** Describe and provide examples of management information system use, such as copies of recent statistical and data summaries; describe the central records system; provide copies of reports. Provide the types of service statistics maintained and provide copies of reports issued and use of the data.

### **13. Budgeting**

- a. The leaders of major organizational components within the department must participate in the preparation of the agency's budget.
- b. There are procedures for firm budget control within the department, including allotment systems, accounting systems, frequent reporting of revenues and expenditures and continuous management review through staff reports and meetings.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance: (Optional) – Please contact RES for additional information/assistance in completing this category.**

### **14. Risk Management**

- a. The risk management plan should involve active interaction between employees at all levels and administration/superiors.
- b. There is a manual of operating procedures for carrying out the risk management plan. All administrative and supervisory personnel shall have a copy of the manual and other employees' procedures pertinent to their responsibilities.
- c. The risk management plan should be monitored in terms of dollar costs.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance: (Optional) - Please contact RES for additional information/assistance in completing this category.**

### **15. Safety and Security**

- a. There shall be special in-service training for the safety of personnel handling traffic control at events and in parking areas. In addition, training shall extend to law enforcement personnel conducted by the Department, or in conjunction with the jurisdictional police or other agency. In-service training must also address the use of volunteers and their training in appropriate security measures.
- b. The overall plan and policies will include use of roadblocks and street closures, those regarding the handling of drugs, weapons, and other evidentiary materials and also those regarding assault and battery, crowd disturbances and other types of instances.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance: (Optional) - Please contact RES for additional information/assistance in completing this category.**

### **16. Evaluations and Research**

- a. Each year, there is at least one experimental demonstration project, or involvement in some aspect of research, as related to any part of parks and recreation operations.
- b. There is a staff member or a consultant with expertise to direct the technical evaluation/research process.

**Suggested Evidence of Compliance: (Optional) - Please contact RES for additional information/assistance in completing this category.**